



ELSAH HISTORY

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The Founding of Elsah

By Beverly Bauser

Imagine an autumn day in 1847 along the Mississippi in Jersey County, upriver of the small town of Alton. Among the sugar maple, ash and mighty oak trees, the faint smell of wood burning permeates the chilly air as Addison Greene drives his ox team to Joseph Askero's (Josiah Askew's) sugar camp at Jersey Landing. Jersey Landing (Elsah), served as a shipping point where farmers found easy access to the Mississippi River. Behind him is the fertile valley of Jersey County, where farmers have begun to harvest their crops. They will bring their produce to the Landing and load it aboard the steamboats to sell at the Alton and St. Louis markets. Among the farmers are William Bates, the Watsons, the Carrolls, the Segraves, the Isaac Terry family, and the George Piggott family.¹

Addison cracks the whip as he hastens the ox along, or at least tries to - the wagon groaning under the weight of his supplies. The trip hasn't been an easy one, but Addison has decided to settle down near the "Father of Waters" to make a little money chopping wood for the occasional steamboats. Wild game is numerous in these parts, and the game, along with fish, are sure to supply his future suppers. After setting up camp and resting a day or two, Addison begins to build his small log home for protection not only from the coming winter, but from the wolves which roam the hills at night.

Wood is plentiful at the Landing to build the cabin, which will be just large enough for a bed to sleep in, a table to eat and work at, and a fireplace for cooking and keeping warm. The numerous clear, cold streams throughout the valley provide ample drinking water, and a bath if the occasion calls for it. With the cabin built, Addison settles in, at times entertaining friends who stop in for a chat. (The present Riverview House encapsulates Greene's original cabin.)

The latest news, he hears, is that land nearby is being bought by speculators who plan to make money when the Government builds the National Road from Washington, DC, to the Mississippi. That project later will fall through as the railroads begin their stretch westward, and the speculators sell off the land to others. In 1852, General James Semple will be one of those buyers.

* * * * *

In 1852, four miles below the mouth of the Illinois River on the bluffs of the Mississippi, James Semple bought a large amount of land. Here he built a comfortable home where he brought his family to reside. In 1853 his newly formed village in the valley below was surveyed and a post office created in the name of Jersey Landing. In 1854, advertisements were posted for land in the village. One advertisement in the *Daily Alton Telegraph*, February 18, 1854, stated: "Any who builds a house such, it need not be very costly, will be entitled to a deed for the lot on which it stands as a donation." It was a permanent arrangement by contract to last "until every lot is improved. The price of every lot received for sale is fixed, so that everyone may know without any bargaining what he has to pay." A number of dwellings were already erected by that date.

The name of the village was later changed to Elsah. Some say the village was named after the little Scottish town of Ailsea (or Ailsa) where Semple's ancestors lived. According to Mary A. Benson, principal of Elsah School, Elsah in the Gaelic dialect of his ancestors meant "a chain of rocks," which would adequately describe the river bluffs along the Mississippi.² The village may also be

named after a small island in the outer Firth of Clyde, Scotland, named "Ailsa Craig." This island is two miles in circumference, and rises 1,110 feet in the Irish Sea. On it is a lighthouse and a ruined keep of uncertain origins. Historically, it was "a haven for Roman Catholics during the Scottish Reformation." In 1597 a Catholic supporter, Hugh Barclay, "took possession of Ailsa Craig," and was intent on using it "as a provisioning and stopping off point for a Spanish invasion, which would re-establish the Catholic faith in Scotland. He was discovered by the Protestant minister," and he "either tried to escape or deliberately drowned himself in the sea off Ailsa Craig. From the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, the island was quarried for its rare type of micro-granite," used to make curling stones (heavy polished stones used in the sport of "curling," similar to shuffleboard).³

There are several places in Scotland named "Ailsa," one of them being near the Irish Sea, where white cliffs line the coast. Whatever the truth of the origin of Elsah's name, the name of Elsah seems to point to the rocks – those awe-inspiring bluffs rarely equaled for their picturesque beauty. It is from those rocks that Elsah derived its lifeblood - stones to build homes and fences, shelter from the elements, and cool, clear water flowing from them in nearby streams.

According to the 1850 Census of Township 6 Range 11 (Elsah),⁴ the following heads of households lived in the Jersey Landing (Elsah) area:

Askew, Hanah	Carroll, Thomas	Picket, Moses
Baugh, David M.	Coleman, B. B.	Piggott, David S.
Bennet, Benjamin M.	Ellison, Nancy	Porter, David
Benson, William	Ellison, William	Slaten, Benjamin F.
Body, Daniel	Greene, Addison	Spangle, Andrew
Botkin, John	Holten, Francis	Spangle, George
Briggs, J. J.	Husk, William	Swan, James G.
Brown, Jacob	Ivey, Andrew	Swan, Samuel T.
Brown, James M.	Mathias, Henry	Terry, Isaac
Cafa, Jackson	Mullikin, William H.	Truckey, Lucy
Canady, William	Nott, David	Waggoner, John D.
Carlin, Thomas	Owens, Elijah	Wheelock, John
Carroll, Richard V.	Owens, Joshua	Wilson, Samuel P.

These "founders of Elsah" were the beginnings of a village that many were to call home. As more and more people made their way to Elsah, the steamboats made more frequent stops, taking passengers and freight to Grafton, Alton or St. Louis. More farms were established on the outskirts, and businesses began to grow. Elections were held and a ferry service to Missouri established. The village served as a vital port for farmers, who shipped their animals and goods to buyers. Elsah also served as a summer resort for those who wanted to escape the intense mid-western summer heat in the cool valleys of Elsah. High on the bluffs, Captain James E. Starr built a vineyard, renting the land to German vine-dressers who took five acres each. A wine house, three stories high, stored valuable and delicious wine. By the 1860s, sweet cherries that were grown on the bluffland were sent to the Chicago markets.

In time, businesses began to thrive, including a large flourmill, general stores, hotels, saloons, drug store, grocery stores, harness shops, wagon shops, ice cream saloons, leather shop, livery, machine shop, meat market, sawmills, tailor shop, and warehouses. In 1874 the Methodist Church was built. Later, the railroad arrived, which brought people from far and near, allowing Elsah to become a bustling and thriving river town.

¹*History of Greene and Jersey Counties, Illinois*, Springfield, IL: Continental Historical Co., 1885, pp. 257 - 274

²Bauser, Beverly A., *Remembering Elsah*, 2009.

³Wikipedia.org

⁴1850 Census, Township 6 Range 11 (Elsah)

<http://ftp.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/il/jersey/1850/pg0010a.txt>

Editor's note: for additional information on James Semple see *Elsah History #77-78*.

Remembering Elsah

A Newly Published, 850 Page Newspaper Compilation Regarding Elsah
By Beverly A. (Porter) Bauser, Author and Researcher

The curiosity of my family history began my journey into genealogy. This curiosity became a passion - almost an obsession, as I combed through archives, visited county clerks' offices, libraries, courthouses, and cemeteries.

The search for my ancestors (Porter, Langley, Segraves, Whitten, Carroll, Drexelius, and Sherman) led me to Elsah, Jersey County, Illinois, where they lived from the 1840s to mid-1930s. For 5 years I searched in each and every newspaper (on microfilm) that was published in Jersey County, and I began to realize that the information concerning Elsah was not only historical, but fascinating. I never knew what this wonderful river town was really like until I began digging into the newspapers. The articles, taken by themselves, may seem unimportant and tedious, but put together, as I have done in this book, they form an informative and heart-warming story of the 1800s. The humor and frankness of the newspaper correspondents will surprise those readers who are used to the "political correctness" of newspapers today, and the articles offer a glimpse into the lives of the people of Elsah never seen before.

They weren't much different than we are - working hard to better themselves and their community, politically and socially minded, and always ready to enjoy special moments of relaxation, such as a picnic at Notch Cliff, a riverboat cruise on a hot summer day, ice skating and sleigh riding in the winter, or a promenade to the river with someone special.

Some of the information I found surprised me - such as discovering that my mother's side of the family (the Drexelius family) operated a store and hotel in Elsah; the fact that Elsah had a baseball team as early as 1875; the large number of visitors (thousands) that came to Elsah to escape the summer heat; and the various clubs and organizations Elsah had. The people of Elsah were very civic minded - proud of their small village on the river. They worked hard to make improvements, bring new businesses to town, and modernize their village with such things as the railroad, hotels, and electricity. The village is now "frozen in time" - forever locked into that moment in history that made Elsah what it is today.



Beverly Bauser

What will you discover in *Remembering Elsah*? When and by whom some of the buildings were constructed or added onto, a description of Notch Cliff Mansion, railroad construction details, the Elsah school and its operations, stories such as the shooting of James McElroy and Mrs. O'Hara by Edward O'Hara, the trial of Joe Voorhees for the killing of Truman Landon (great story!), the robbery and assault of Xavier Schneider (yes, he did survive!) and the trial that followed, the Piasa Bluffs Hotel, an 1800s Business Directory, a record of village and school officials, cemetery burials, a photo essay, a name index, and much, much more!

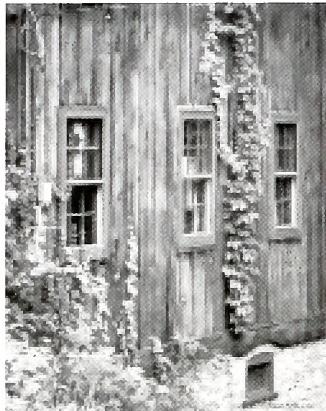
My book, *Remembering Elsah*, is available for viewing at the Elsah Museum, located in the Village Hall. The book is available for purchase on CD as a searchable e-book [PDF format] at the Elsah Village Hall/Museum and at Jeremiah's, both on LaSalle Street in Elsah. Or send an email to: remembering.elsah@yahoo.com for details.

Museum News

The museum closed for the winter on Saturday, October 31 and will reopen April 2, 2010. During the 2009 season the museum welcomed 683 visitors. Receipts from the Book and Bake Sale on October 17 totaled \$516.50 (\$218.25 for baked goods alone). This money will be added to the museum's conservation and exhibit fund. A sincere thank you to all those who donated books and fresh baked goods:

Discovering Elsah was the theme for our tenth annual photo contest and 19 photographers entered their work for judging. Our judge, Janice Nesser-Chu, selected two \$150 purchase prize winners and two special recognitions. The exhibit opened July 25 and closed October 17.

The winning photographs for 2009...



Purchase Prize winner for the Village
Elsah's Peek Holes
by Carolyn Schlueter



Purchase Prize winner for bluff
and surrounding area
Bluff Beauty
by Rebecca Matejka McVay



Special Recognition
Discovering Oneself in Elsah
by Gretchen Batz



Special Recognition
The Old Red Barn
by W. Joe Saxton

The Village Museum is jointly maintained by the Village of Elsah and Historic Elsah Foundation. Members of the museum committee are: Marge Doerr, Inge Mack, Marie Oleson, Jane Pfeifer, Jim Schmidt, Mary Anne Schmidt, and Lynn Schreiber.

Remembering Friends



Mary Elizabeth Read (Betsy) Holt

Long time Elsah resident and HEF member, Betsy Holt, passed away in July at her summer home in Leland, Michigan. Betsy was born and raised in St. Louis and attended Principia from kindergarten through four years of college. She and her husband remained devoted and involved with Principia throughout their lives with Henry serving as Chairman and Chief Executive for twenty years.

Betsy participated at a high level in sports during high school and college and was selected for the U.S. Olympic Field Hockey Team but was unable to compete because the Games were cancelled during World War II. Betsy owned one of Elsah's loveliest homes at 3 Mill Street, a home that was previously owned by her mother, Eleanor Read. Henry passed away in 1997 (see *Elsah History* #72/73).

Edward (Ned) Bradley

Longtime citizen of Elsah Ned Bradley passed away on October 29. Ned and his wife, Paula, bought the former Village Inn at 14 La Salle Street in 1972 and have enjoyed living there ever since. Ned was professor of French at Principia College for 42 years.

Prior to teaching, Ned served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy during WWII. He skippered an LCT (Landing Craft Tanks) in preparation for D-Day, depositing tanks on Omaha Beach to provide firepower for the landing, and then completed his military service in Japan.

Ned's wartime assignment in France furthered his lifelong love of that country. Introducing students to French language and culture was an enduring joy. His French breakfasts—featuring croissants and brioches he made himself—were just one way he brought French culture alive to his classes over the years.

Ned lived to further international cultural understanding and respect through language. His personal friendships with many students endured, and seeing former students become French teachers themselves was deeply gratifying to him.

Elsah was also dear to Ned's heart. He served as a village board member for 20 years and has always been a dedicated friend of HEF.

A memorial gathering for Paul O. Williams

On Sunday afternoon, October 4, friends of Paul O. Williams gathered in Farley's Music Hall to remember this accomplished teacher, poet, and writer who passed away in June (see *Elsah History* #97). Gretchen Batz, Colin Campbell, and Nancy Wiley, read a few of Paul's published poems and essays. Longtime friend and colleague, Dr. Randy Brooks from Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, spoke of Paul's important contributions to the literary world. He was the author of several books, including the seven volume Pelbar series for which he was awarded the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in Science Fiction in 1983.

In 1971 Paul was a co-founder of Historic Elsah Foundation with Charles Hosmer, and he was the first editor of this newsletter, a post he filled for eight years before moving to California in 1979.

Paul's wife, Kerry Lynn, lives in Hayward, California. He also has two children, Evan and Ann.

Report to Members and Friends

A new roof for Farley's Music Hall

The installation of Farley's new roof is almost complete even though October turned out to be the wettest on record. The discovery that one of our chimneys needed to be tuckpointed before flashing could be installed delayed the completion of the project while we arranged for Metro East Tuckpointing to do this work at a cost of \$1,500. Erlinger Roofing Company's bid for the new roof was \$30,725. Donations to the roof fund raising campaign totaled \$29,185.

Friends of Charles Hosmer and Paul Williams, who wanted to pay tribute to both men, responded to an appeal to name the interior meeting hall in Farley's for these two visionaries on local research who were the founders of HEF and served as HEF's first president and first editor. The exact wording for the new name for the interior hall is being developed and will be published in the next newsletter. We are grateful to those who contributed so generously in honor of these two men.

--Marie Oleson, president

A sincere thank you to those members and friends (listed below) who have contributed so generously to the fund for the new roof for Farley's. Many donations were given in memory of Helen Andrews, Ned Bradley, Roy Coffman, Betsy Holt, and Paul Williams. One gift was given by Brenda Coffman in honor of Elsah residents Tim and Deborah Smith, in appreciation for their friendship and support after the passing of Roy Coffman.

Holly & Bert Althaver
Norman Anderson*
Rebecca & Jeff Anderson
Ann & Mark Badasch*
Catherine Barlow
Gretchen & Roger Batz
Noreen & Jim Bayer
Marie Jureit Beamish
Lindell & John Belote
Joy & Tim Booth
Paula & Ned Bradley**
Norman Brokaw
Colin Campbell
Lenore & Donald Campbell
Frank Chadwick
Susan Chadwick
Rita Chaney
Duncan Charters
Brenda Coffman
Jeanne Colette Collester**
Sue Collester*
Carole & Robert Craig
Georgia & Richard Dearborn
Marjorie Doerr
Jennifer Dyck
Joan & Fritz Faeber*
Rosemarie Gatehouse
Herawati & Eric Gerber
Jule Gerrish
Marjorie & Hank Hamlin
Ellen Hanold

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Edwin Harper
Marilyn & Thomas Heath
Joyce & Charles Heck
Betsy Holt**
Martha Hufford
Margaret & Andrew Hyde**
Cindy & Steve Ira**
Adria & Ken Johnson
Genie & Edward Keller*
Betty Jean Kistler
Lucian Krukowski
Ute Schweitzer Levi
Lucy & Merlin Lewis
Jeri & Ed Lewitz**
Inge Mack**
Carol McFall
Eleonore Nelson*
Elizabeth Olson
Marie & Ole Oleson**
Abraham Oseroff
Lorraine & Warren Passmore
Johnette Schuler Perry
Sandra Peterson
Jane & David Pfeifer**
Rosemary & Paul Robinson
Sara & Robert Rockabrand
Thomas Russell
Mary Anne & Jim Schmidt**
Daniel Schmit
Lynn & Eric Schreiber
Susan & Neal Sebbard



*A new roof for Farley's Music Hall
Photo: Jane Pfeifer*

Charles Sheppard
Jeanne & Gene Shultz
Ann Barnes Simpson*
David Slusser
Deborah & Tim Smith**
Gloria Snyder
Vicky & Peter Stuart
Gerald Taetz
Mary Talcott
Christine Telthorst
Ellen & John Thompson
Rose & Tim Tomlinson**
Karen & Dan Treadwell
Alma Tripidi
Victorian Society of America
Charlanne & Bill Wachtel
Marian Wells
Nancy Wiley
Mary Williams
Missy & John Williams
KerryLynn & Paul O. Williams
Timathea Workman
Susan & Mark Young

**a gift of \$500 or more*

***a gift of \$1,000 or more*

Village Happenings

Welcome to new appointees to the Village Board of Trustees, Linda Cunningham and Cody Favilla.

The Village Board is working to balance the general budget. Board members have been successful in minimizing deficits and utilizing cost saving measures and will hold a Truth in Taxation Hearing in November to consider the possibility of raising property taxes. The Mayor is also putting together an Economic Development Task Force to explore ways to generate revenue for the village.

The Board recently passed three ordinances for amending the Zoning Ordinance of the Village of Elsah.

1. Home Occupation: Any occupation or profession carried on by a member of the immediate family or household residing in the dwelling, in connection with which:

- (1) There is no sign used other than a single name plate not more than 1 foot square in area;
- (2) There is no display, appearance or indication, other than the permitted sign, which will indicate in any fashion from the exterior of the building that the building is being utilized in whole or in part for any purpose other than a dwelling;
- (3) There is no commodity sold (articles sold or offered for sale) upon the premises;
- (4) There is no person employed in the home occupation other than a member of the immediate family or household residing on the premises;
- (5) There is no mechanical or other equipment utilized in connection with the home occupation which is visible from the exterior of the building or indicates that a home occupation is occurring within the building and/or which in use creates any excessive noise, odor, dust, fumes, vibration, smoke, electrical interference or other adverse effect or indication that such home occupation is occurring on the premises;
- (6) The use involved in the home occupation is incidental to the residential use of the building;
- (7) The use is conducted within a portion of the main building, and does not exceed twenty percent (20%) of the building's square footage and does not involve outside storage;
- (8) The use will not cause increased vehicular or pedestrian traffic or for the additional parking space for the home occupation, and will not obstruct any existing parking space; and
- (9) There are no motor vehicle repairs performed or personal services provided on the premises in connection with the home occupation, except personal services which are consistent with the historic character of the district and have been approved by the Zoning Board.

(Please note that the Home Occupation ordinance does NOT allow homes to be used for commercial purposes.)

2. Landscaping: The planting of flowers, shrubs, trees; outlining of garden beds with brick, natural stone or natural wood; minor grade changes which do not impact adjacent property or drainage; natural stone walls, either dry stack or mortared, up to 24 inches tall; and garden walkways. Landscaping which is within the foregoing definition shall not constitute a "structure" under the terms of this ordinance and a Certificate of Appropriateness under Ordinance No. 190 of the Village of Elsah is not required for landscaping within the foregoing definition.

3. Mendicants or Vagrants.: It shall be unlawful for any mendicant or vagrant to frequent any depot, store, theatre, street, alley, driveway, parking lot, sidewalk, park, or other place frequented by the public in the Village.

Any person found sleeping in such a place, and who has no established domicile or residence within the corporate boundaries of the Village of Elsah, shall be considered vagrant.

It shall be unlawful for any person to sleep in a motor vehicle parked in a public place, including, but not limited to, streets, alleys, and public parking lots, or on private driveways, yards, or properties within the Village of Elsah. Persons having an established residence or domicile within the corporate boundaries of the Village of Elsah may allow use of their property for guests to sleep in a motor vehicle specifically designed and intended for overnight occupancy for a period not to exceed three (3) nights.

(This ordinance was strengthened following a disturbing vagrancy situation in the village this past summer.)

The Board has sent a newsletter to all residents, informing them of upcoming activities, and also a letter from the Zoning Board, reaffirming the mission and purpose of our Zoning Ordinance.

Last June a storm felled a large tree in Fountain Square Park, knocking out power lines and blocking Mill Street



Photo by Jeralyn Lewitz

Upcoming Activities in the Village of Elsah...

Holiday Tree Lighting Gather around the Christmas tree in front of the Elsah Methodist Church to officially kick off the holiday season with the lighting of the Christmas tree. There will be singing of carols, lots of hot chocolate, and maybe even a visit from Santa Claus.

Saturday, December 5, at 6:00 p.m. in Selma Square

Christmas Sing — All are welcome

Sunday, December 21 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Starts in the Christian Science Church, moves to the Methodist Church, and ends with refreshments and fellowship in Farley's Music Hall

The Village warmly welcomes two new babies...

...a new son, Diego, born August 11 to Amy Cloud and Segue Lara

...a new daughter, Kamala, born August 13 to Makena and Eric Gray

and we welcome new residents...

...Margaret D'Evelyn — 74 Mill Street

...Pam Gunsten — 7 Mill Street

...Beth Halford and Butch Sands — 86 Mill Street

...Corey Thornton — 111 Mill Street

and make note of a move within the village...

...Sandra Stack — 22 Mill Street (the Buggy Shop) (from White Oak Subdivision to village)

and we bid farewell to...

...Terry & Gayle Lang — 7 Mill Street

...Ann Modak and Janice Eddleman — 74 Mill Street

...Tom Phillips & Tuan Nguyen — 86 Mill Street



Historic Elsah Foundation's officers and board members:

Seated in front—Jerry Taetz, Paula Bradley, Jeralyn Lewitz, Mary Anne Schmidt.

Standing—Cathy Barlow, Inge Mack, Tim Tomlinson, Jane Pfeifer, Steve Ira, Susan Young, Ann Badasch, Marie Oleson, Jeanne Shultz.

Historic Elsah Foundation Board for 2010:

President	Marie Oleson
Vice President	Paula Bradley
Secretary	Ann Badasch
Treasurer	Jane Pfeifer
Board members:	
Steve Ira	Jeanne Shultz
Jeralyn Lewitz	Gerald Taetz
Inge Mack	Tim Tomlinson
Mary Anne Schmidt	Susan Young

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Patron \$25 to \$99

Supporter \$100 to \$249

Founders' Circle \$250 and above

James Semple Business Associate \$100

Please send memberships or letters to the editor to:
P.O. Box 117, Elsah, IL 62028

The purposes of Historic Elsah Foundation are stated in the Articles of Incorporation (1971):

“...the preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, houses, architecture and culture of the Village of Elsah, Illinois, the historic areas, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and periodicals regarding the Village, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and educational value of the Village.”